

VZCZCXRO8029

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHKUK RUEHROV

DE RUEHLB #0698/01 1751528

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 241528Z JUN 09

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5180

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3422

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3947

RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000698

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
INL/FO AND INL/AE
ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
PARIS FOR RWALLER
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON
DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN, BARGHOUT
OVP FOR HMUSTAFA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/24/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PBTS EAID IS SY LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: OUTGOING PM SINIORA COMMITS TO BORDER SECURITY PROGRAM

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1. 4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On the last full day of his government's mandate before it became a caretaker government, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora confirmed to international donors June 19 Lebanon's continuing and firm commitment to secure the eastern border with Syria. Urging international donor support for the extension of the Common Border Force (CBF) along Lebanon's eastern border, Siniora stressed the importance of the border security project, and the need to include a strong socio-economic component to address the needs of affected border communities. End Summary.

¶12. (C) On June 19, one day before the formal end of his government's term of office, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora called together the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL), ambassadors of principal donor countries, and Lebanese ministers to review efforts to date to strengthen Lebanese control over its northern border, and to reaffirm the ongoing commitment of Lebanon to extend the model of the Common Border Force to the eastern border, starting with the first 70 kilometers piece in northeast Lebanon. Attending the meeting were the U.S., British, French, and Danish Ambassadors, the UN Special Coordinator, representatives from Germany and the Netherlands, the Ministers of Finance, Mohammad Chatah, and Foreign Affairs, Fawzi Salloukh, and representatives from the four agencies that comprise the Common Border Force: the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), General Security, Customs and the Internal Security Force. Also present were the outgoing and newly appointed heads of the CBF's Implementation Project Unit (IPU), the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Chief of Operations, and the Prime Minister's military aide.

¶13. (C) Stating that he will make sure that the new government is fully briefed on the border security program, and that it will be on the desk of the new Prime Minister on his first day in office, Siniora assured the assembled donors that Lebanon has a long history of stability in terms of government policies. Successive Lebanese governments always

honor the commitments made by previous governments, he declared. (The cabinet, with Siniora as PM, continues in caretaker status until a new cabinet is formed and approved by parliament.)

BORDER CONTROL:
IMPLEMENTATION IN STAGES

¶4. (C) The meeting afforded Siniora the opportunity to report on his government's progress in meeting the directives of UNSCR 1701 calling for secure borders. He thanked the donors involved in contributing to the Northern Border Pilot Program -- now referred to as Common Border Force I (CBFI). He commended specifically Germany, Denmark, Britain, and the U.S. and urged them to continue their assistance in support of the CBF II, III and IV .

¶5. (C) Two weeks before, a two-day workshop had brought together donors and members of the security services comprising the CBF to define the operational strategy and resource requirements necessary to expand the CBF eastward. Lebanon's eastern border plan calls for securing the border in three stages. Stage One, also referred to as CBF II, encompasses the area in the north of Lebanon stretching from the Fisan Valley (where CBF I ends) and proceeding south to Arsal. Stage One was the target of the workshop, and is the only stage whose implementation been officially sanctioned by the Lebanese cabinet in its December 20, 2008 decision to extend the model of the CBF along the Eastern border. Stage One is projected to be fully operational by June 1, 2010, and

BEIRUT 00000698 002 OF 003

the entire border secured by March 2012 when Stage III (CBF IV) is projected to be completed. Cost estimates for the first stage are US\$50 million. The Lebanese government expects that donors will contribute significantly to this initiative.

DONORS' RECOMMENDATIONS

¶6. (C) Representing the donor countries at the June 19 meeting, UNSCOL'S Michael Williams commended the work of the Lebanese implementation unit and summarized the donors' response to the border work plan. Using donor-approved talking points, Williams explained that the donors would need a firm commitment from the next government that it will institute border control over the entire Eastern border, not just one segment of the border, before they could make an informed decision on financially supporting the border project. Donors would also need to have a clear sense of the scope and cost of the whole project, rather than just Stage One, before making any commitments of support.

¶7. (C) Although Siniora lacked the capacity to make this commitment on behalf of the incoming government, his comments throughout the meeting suggested his sense that the Council of Ministers' decision of December, 2008 supported securing the entire 220 kilometer border, not just the first 70 kilometers. He also playfully challenged the donors by stating "we have delivered, now it is time for you to deliver."

ADDRESS SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

¶8. (C) Alluding to the dire economic situation of many of the residents in the border area, the donors urged a strong socio-economic component be included in the border strategy to address the needs of the affected communities.

¶9. (C) Siniora endorsed this suggestion. He noted that the government must make the communities along the border believe that what is being done to secure the borders is for their

benefit, and that any plan will positively affect their way of life and improve their living conditions. He specifically suggested including water and sewage projects in the border communities.

PUBLIC AND MEDIA OUTREACH

¶10. (C) Siniora also noted the need to improve media outreach on the border project. Much has been accomplished, he stated, but it has neither been conveyed to the people who reside in the border communities nor has it been given adequate coverage in the media. (Note: less than one week after this comment, the head of the IPU was tasked to address the media in al-Aboudiyah, one of the newly relocated legal border crossing points. The Lebanese government released press statements explaining the move was part of a new plan for better controlling the Lebanese-Syrian border and "bringing them up to international standards").

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Siniora clearly considers the border project his baby, is proud of what has been accomplished, and wants to see it continue. Although it is early in the government formation process, there is nothing to indicate major opposition to the border plan and its extension. Once the new government is formed, we intend to seek a firm GOL commitment to extend the CBF model along the entire eastern border. U.S. and international donors' assistance should be coordinated through a unified international advisory team

BEIRUT 00000698 003 OF 003

within the IPU that includes both a project management advisor and a team of technical advisors, to avoid duplication/redundancy and ensure equipment and training compatibility.

SISON